Provision of satellite phones to subscribers

1904. SHRI PYARELAL KHANDELWAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to provide satellite phones to all the applicants of rural areas listed in waiting list by March, 2006; and

(b) if not, Government's intention in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) No, Sir. However, remote and isolated villages, which can not be covered by existing terrestrial technologies, are being covered by Satellite based technologies *i.e.* Digital Satellite Phone Terminals (DSPTs) for providing Village Public Telephones (VPTs).

BSNL has been awarded work for provisioning of VPTs in all the remaining uncovered 66,822 villages excluding villages having population less than 100, lying in thick forest areas etc., 14,183 of these villages are to be provided Digital Satellite Phone Terminals on VPTs.

Role of post offices in banking operations

1905. SHRI R.P. GOENKA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is a proposal to redefine the role and activities of the post offices to, *inter-alia*, undertake some of the banking operations across the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof, and its present status; and

(c) the details of schemes drawn up to create the required infrastructure in post offices and to suitably upgrade the skills of the selected postal staff who would handle their new responsibilities as also machinery proposed to be established to provide the required level of expertise in managing and deploying large funds likely to be mobilized by the postal banks?